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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 005938

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S-CKELLY, NEA, AND EUR/WE-MENNUTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2012

TAGS: [IS](#) [IZ](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#) [VTIS](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE CALLS IN AMBASSADOR TO CONVEY CONCERNS ON  
MIDDLE EAST AND BETHLEHEM

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON. REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) HOLY SEE FOREIGN MINISTER ARCHBISHOP JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN CALLED IN AMBASSADOR NOVEMBER 27 TO CONVEY THE POPE'S CONCERNS ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, PARTICULARLY THE ISRAELI REOCCUPATION OF BETHLEHEM. WITH THE CHRISTMAS SEASON APPROACHING, TAURAN SAID THE CURRENT CURFEW IN BETHLEHEM -- PROJECTED TO LAST THROUGH DECEMBER 30 BY SOME ISRAELI AUTHORITIES -- WOULD HAVE VERY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES. HE INDICATED THAT IF THE CURFEW WAS NOT LIFTED AND ACCESS TO THE HOLY SITES GUARANTEED, THE POPE WOULD BE COMPELLED TO MAKE A STATEMENT SHARPLY CRITICAL OF ISRAEL FOR RESTRICTING THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION. TAURAN WELCOMED THE PROPOSAL FOR A QUARTET MEETING IN WASHINGTON DECEMBER 20, ADDING THAT IT WAS TIME TO MOVE FROM ANALYSIS TO CONCRETE STEPS ON THE GROUND. HE ALSO APPLAUDED PRESIDENT BUSH'S DECISION NOT TO MOVE THE U.S. EMBASSY TO JERUSALEM, WHICH HE SAID WOULD HAVE BEEN A CAUSE OF "GREAT DISTURBANCE." ON IRAQ, TAURAN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THE HOLY SEE HAD SENT A MESSAGE TO THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT REITERATING THEIR BELIEF THAT SADDAM MUST MEET HIS UN COMMITMENTS. END SUMMARY.

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POPE WANTS END TO CURFEW, ENSURE CHRISTMAS ACCESS TO HOLY SITES  
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2. (C) ARCHBISHOP TAURAN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR NOVEMBER 27 THAT THE POPE WAS PERSONALLY DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE MOST RECENT ISRAELI INCURSION INTO BETHLEHEM AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ONGOING CURFEW THERE FOR THE UPCOMING CHRISTMAS SEASON. WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT ISRAEL HAD PULLED BACK ITS TANKS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY, TAURAN SAID  
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BETHLEHEM REMAINED UNDER A STRICT CURFEW THAT HAD SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS EVENTS AT THE HOLY SITES. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT SOME ISRAELI AUTHORITIES HAD SUGGESTED THE CURFEW COULD LAST UNTIL DECEMBER 30. RHETORICALLY ASKING, "WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS," TAURAN SAID THAT IF THE CURFEW WERE TO CONTINUE THROUGH THAT TIME, THE POPE WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO ISSUE A STATEMENT CRITICAL OF THE ISRAELIS FOR "RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF RELIGION." THE HOLY SEE RECOGNIZED THAT SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD BE LIKELY TO PROVOKE A POINTED ISRAELI REACTION, AND WOULD STRONGLY PREFER THAT STEPS BE TAKEN TO AVOID THIS SCENARIO. TAURAN SAID HE HOPED THE U.S. COULD WORK WITH ISRAEL TO AVOID ANY PROBLEMS DURING THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON.

3. (C) THE AMBASSADOR AGREED TO CONVEY TAURAN'S CONCERNS TO WASHINGTON. HE NOTED THAT ISRAEL WAS CERTAINLY SEEKING TO AVOID A REOCCURRENCE OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY, AND ASKED TAURAN WHETHER THEY PERCEIVED A RISK THAT THE PALESTINIANS MIGHT SEEK TO CREATE TROUBLE IN THE HOLY SITES. TAURAN SAID HE DOUBTED THE PALESTINIANS WOULD OCCUPY THE CHURCH AT THIS TIME, BECAUSE THE INTERNATIONAL BACKLASH WOULD BE TOO GREAT.

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QUARTET: TIME FOR CONCRETE STEPS  
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4. (C) THE AMBASSADOR TOLD TAURAN THAT THE QUARTET WOULD BE MEETING IN WASHINGTON DECEMBER 20 TO CONTINUE WORKING ON A ROADMAP TOWARD ACHIEVING THE PRESIDENT'S VISION OF A TWO-STATE SOLUTION. HE NOTED THAT CONTINUED VIOLENCE  
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THREATENED TO DERAIL THESE EFFORTS, AND THAT PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI RESTRAINT WAS NEEDED TO IMPROVE THE SECURITY SITUATION, ACHIEVE REFORMS, AND ALLEVIATE THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION. TAURAN WELCOMED THE CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT OF THE QUARTET, BUT SAID "THE TIME HAD ARRIVED TO MOVE FROM ANALYSIS TO CONCRETE STEPS." HE ALSO REPEATED HIS LONG-STANDING VIEW

THAT AN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING OR MONITORING PRESENCE ON THE GROUND IS NEEDED TO END THE SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE. ONLY SUCH A PRESENCE, HE EXPLAINED, WOULD BE ABLE TO DETERMINE WHO WAS VIOLATING AGREEMENTS. PRESSED ON THE COMPOSITION OF SUCH A FORCE, TAURAN SAID THAT WAS NOT A MATTER ON WHICH THE HOLY SEE COULD COMMENT. TAURAN ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER A RECENT STATEMENT OF PM SHARON DENYING THE POTENTIAL FOR TWO STATES.

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JERUSALEM: PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT'S POSITION  
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15. (C) TAURAN APPLAUDED THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION NOT TO SHIFT THE U.S. POSITION REGARDING JERUSALEM AS CALLED FOR IN THE RECENT CONGRESSIONAL ACTION. HE NOTED THAT WHEN THE HOLY SEE HAD HEARD THE INITIAL REPORTS OF THAT ACTION, THE POPE HAD

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NEA-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00
	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00	/007W

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O 111521Z DEC 02  
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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BEEN "UPSET AND PERPLEXED." TAURAN NOTED THAT THIS "WOULD HAVE BEEN A REASON FOR GREAT DISTURBANCE IN THE REGION." THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION WAS MADE IN THE FACE OF CONSIDERABLE CONGRESSIONAL PRESSURE.

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IRAQ: HOLY SEE TELLS SADDAM TO FLY RIGHT  
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16. (C) TURNING TO IRAQ, TAURAN SAID THE HOLY SEE WAS VERY PLEASED THAT WAR APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN AVOIDED FOR THE TIME BEING. RECOGNIZING THAT THE NEXT STEP WAS UP TO IRAQ, THE HOLY SEE HAD RECENTLY SENT A MESSAGE TO IRAQ MAKING CLEAR THEIR BELIEF THAT SADDAM NEEDED TO ABIDE BY THE UN RESOLUTIONS AND ALLOW THE INSPECTORS FULL ACCESS TO POTENTIAL WMD SITES. THE AMBASSADOR ASSURED TAURAN THAT THE U.S. DID NOT WANT WAR, BUT THAT IT WAS UP TO IRAQ TO ASSURE THE WORLD THAT IT HAD DISARMED AS REQUIRED. TAURAN ACKNOWLEDGED THIS, BUT STRESSED THAT WAR WOULD HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REGION, AND WOULD LIKELY INCREASE THE "APPETITE FOR TERROR" AMONG RADICALS IN THE REGION.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) FOLLOWING THE DISASTROUS OCCUPATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY LAST SPRING, THE HOLY SEE IS DETERMINED TO ENSURE THAT THE CHURCH DOES NOT AGAIN BECOME CAUGHT IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CROSS-FIRE. EVER CONSCIOUS OF THE SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY SITES, THE POPE WOULD SEE ISRAELI RESTRICTIONS THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON AS A SYMBOL OF CONTINUED HIGH-HANDEDNESS AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE SHARPLY CRITICAL IF THE CURFEW WOULD MAR THE HOLY SEASON. ANY ASSURANCE WE COULD PROVIDE THE HOLY SEE THAT WE ARE ENCOURAGING ISRAEL TO ENSURE A PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS IN

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BETHLEHEM WOULD BE WELCOMED AS A SIGN OF GOOD FAITH, AND A MUCH-NEEDED GLIMMER OF HOPE AT A TROUBLED TIME.

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